



DHS Matters!

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Lansing fundraiser nets more than \$16,000 for Ingham County foster children

From Julie Horn Alexander

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A Nov. 1 fundraiser at Lansing's Grand Tower Building raised \$16,185 for local foster children. The annual **Caring About Kids** bake sale, pizza lunch, raffle and silent auction exceeded all fundraising goals this year. Under the leadership and sponsorship of DHS Director Ismael Ahmed and Chief Deputy Director Stanley Stewart, DHS employees made donations and purchases during the day-long event.

Caring About Kids is a Lansing-based nonprofit organization started in 1994 by DHS employees to provide money for special things for foster children in Ingham County. The volunteer group raises funds from the annual fundraiser in November and through donations by individuals, an annual golf outing, bake, book and craft sales, hot dog sales, ice cream socials and small foundation grants. The DHS graciously allows the organization to hold its fundraiser in the Grand Tower Building.

"Stanley Stewart and I had the pleasure of meeting many of you as we worked on the pizza line," Ahmed said in a message to Central Office employees. "We felt energized by the experience and we were very impressed with the hard work and generosity of organizers, donors and bidders. Congratulations to (event) co-chairs **Julie Horn Alexander** and **Judy Droste** (both from DHS Office of Quality Assurance) and to each of you for your part in making the event a success for foster children in Ingham County."

In addition to sales of donated breakfast items and baked goods, the silent auction included three conference rooms filled with 569 items. The list of donated prizes this year was very impressive. They included a \$100 gift certificate to the Eastwood Towne Center near East Lansing, an autographed Tom Izzo basketball, tickets to Wharton Center for the Performing Arts at Michigan State University, a handmade patchwork quilt, condo for a week on Ormond Beach, Fla., a \$200 gas card, and a diamond necklace. The exciting day ended with raffle prize winners' names being drawn. The 50-50 grand prize winner went home with \$2,123, as well.

The planning committee that put together this year's auction-sale includes DHS employees **Ruth Barnhill**, **Janice Berry**, **Sue Couzzins**, **Michael Guasco**, **Tricia Headley**, **Chris Heisler**, **Nancy Ridley**, **David Russell** and **Linda Tobia** as well as **Kathi Pioszak** of Early Childhood Investment Corporation and **Cathy Thomas** of Michigan Department of Information Technology.

Since 1994, Caring About Kids volunteers have provided foster children with birthday gifts, gift certificates, trips, camps, tutoring and books. They've sponsored outings for foster children and their families, musical instruments for children through a partnership with Marshall Music in Lansing, and camperships for foster home siblings separated from their brothers or sisters.

■ For more information go to <http://www.caringaboutkidsinc.org/>



DHS director **Ismael Ahmed** (left) and **Stanley Stewart**, the department's chief deputy director, were among "celebrity" lunch servers at the Nov. 1 fundraiser that netted more than \$16,000 for Ingham County foster children.

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Some of the generous volunteers that made the project a reality (from left):
[Mary Zonca](#), [Lindsay Ball](#), [Rebecca Robydek](#) and [Timmy Zonca](#).



Above: Passing out tasty and delicious *rigatoni alla Guiseppe* from the Angelfest taste fest.

Local biker community shows their support for foster care

From Karen Urquhart
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Music-motorcycles-munchies! These ingredients brought hundreds of people together during a sunny weekend in September for the first annual Angelfest event benefiting the foster children of Macomb County. This taste fest-style event, held on the grounds of Wolverine Harley-Davidson in Clinton Township, featured the tasty cuisine of local area restaurants, caterers and specialty shops, live music from two fabulous rock-n-roll bands, and model displays of brand new 2008 Full Metal Attraction Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Patrons feasted on samples of everything from chicken satay over shrimp fried rice and Guinness Irish stew, to gourmet ice cream and apple or cherry pie.

Together, we raised \$6,674 during this celebration of food and music to help fund the needs of children involved with our foster care and CPS programs. In addition, our food vendors, the entertainment community, and other local businesses generously contributed \$23,982 of in-kind donations to make this a fun and successful event. DHS staff, foster parents, family and friends gave their time and talent as volunteers for this worthwhile cause to help our kids have a better quality of life. "The volunteers were helpful, the food and entertainment were great, and anything for foster kids is a great cause," said Kenny LaFevere, kitchen manager of Hamlin Pub, one of the event vendors. "We look forward to doing it again next year!"

CPS specialist puts on concert, raises \$1,000 for children

From Lynn Contreras

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Soo Choe, a 17-year state employee and foster care purchase of service specialist, performed a concert at the Birmingham Unitarian Church in Bloomfield Hills to raise money for the CFS District Children's Fund. She raised \$1,000! She played 15 piano pieces from Chopin and Mozart to Beethoven and Schumann.



Soo Choe at the keyboard.

Soo, who is originally from South Korea, started piano at age five and, at age 12, she and her family immigrated to the United States. Soo has since studied at the Bryn Mawr Conservatory in Pennsylvania and at the University of Michigan where she majored in psychology and speech pathology and minored in piano performance. From 1988-89 she taught English as a second language for the Korean military in Seoul, South Korea. Soo studied piano at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music in Russia in 1996. She has taught piano at Schoolcraft College and currently teaches piano privately.

Soo has struggled most of her life with stuttering; however, while playing the piano, she feels she is free to express her thoughts and feelings without any limit. Piano is a tool for her to communicate with people. Her last concert was in 2003 and was performed in honor of her mother who passed away that July.

Soo was in a car accident in January 2007 when her car was totaled and she had to be removed from her vehicle using the Jaws of Life mechanism. Miraculously, she only broke her right ankle in several places and is still recovering from the surgery to heal her foot. Soo said the car accident actually gave her an opportunity to focus on piano practice.

Soo feels very thankful to be alive and to be able to give back to the children who are in foster care. Thank you, Soo, for your generosity to these children.

Jakes give a kid a ride day

From Mary Zonca

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Jake's Give a Kid a Ride Day is a special event that takes place every fall. Jake's Ride pairs foster children with experienced motorcycle riders from the Wolverine HOG Chapter for a 45-minute country ride to a local cider mill -- on a Harley Davidson motorcycle! At the cider mill, the kids are joined with their foster and adoptive families for a day of fun.

This ride originally started because of a former foster child named Jake. Jake rode in a motorcycle charity ride where the proceeds went toward foster children for Macomb County. During the ride he had such a good experience that he told the man he rode with, "When he was older, he wanted to buy a Harley and give every foster and adopted child a ride on it." When the Wolverine Chapter heard about this, their response was "Why wait?" Now, every October, the chapter, Big Red Cider Mill, and DHS employees make this event possible.

This year, Jake's Ride took place Oct. 20 when 30 foster children attended the ride and more than 100 people participated. In addition to the ride to the cider mill, the HOG chapter provided the children with a Jake's Ride t-shirt, sunglasses, lunch, apple picking and an armband giving them admission to all activities offered throughout the orchard. The children felt like stars for the day as the parade of motorcycles circled the drive into the cider mill with kids grinning from ear to ear. People were waving and clapping as the bikes parked in rows on the grass.

The men and women riders that volunteered their time and funded this event really took the time to talk to these children and make a difference. Some of the children were heard stating, "He talked to me the whole time," "She is really cool," "It was so relaxing," "The man said I wouldn't fall off and he was right," and "It was the coolest thing I have ever experienced". The kids also received a DVD of the day for their memory books.

This ride is about a dream one young man had, and the Clinton Township Wolverine Chapter #1332 made it happen. Jake's dream is passed on to each child to show them to follow their dreams and that they are special and can make a difference in this world. These men and women are an inspiration to these children and we thank them for all of the kindness and support they have given our children.

It's finally here!

SWSS CPS saves time, legwork for CPS specialists

From Cindy Eberhard, MSW

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Did you know CPS specialists formerly had to use a variety of systems – Central Registry, CIMS and ASSIST – to see if a family complaint they received had history in another county? Those specialists remember playing phone tag with another specialist or waiting for a file to be copied and mailed for their review of the family history in order to make a good decision on the complaint they received. Also, in the good old days, CPS specialists completed their narratives either by hand, typewriter, or through a Word document.

For a long time it seemed like we were working in an archaic system even though everything around us was becoming more technologically advanced. Well, no more. It's finally here, the new SWSS CPS application with access to statewide history to assist our specialists with completing a thorough investigation. We've evolved from working with multiple systems to completing our responsibilities in one – the new SWSS CPS application.

The application allows specialists to review historical complaints on a family through our Statewide Automated Child Welfare System. In addition, specialists can now dispose of these complaints through one application. They will no longer have to complete dispositions as they previously did through multiple systems.

Because the complaints are now managed in the new SWSS CPS application, specialists also have access to review and print other county's investigation reports, updated service plans, legal petitions, and placement history on a family, improving the thoroughness and accuracy of decision and reports.

The new application also provides other benefits: less time at the computer, immediate policy compliance, up-to-date case oversight and monitoring for supervisors, streamlined case reading, and enhanced child safety.

I want to recognize the efforts of **Laurie Johnson** from the CPS program office and **Bonnie Corkwell**, our DIT programmer, for the creation and development of this application. The application still has some defects and we are working on improving its reliability, accuracy, and efficiency. We continue to gather enhancements from the field in order to make this application more efficient.

I want to offer **special acknowledgements to these groups** for the time, dedication and hard work at testing and improving this application for the state:

- Close to 300 field staff involved with design consultation, testing and piloting as SWSS CPS core testers.
- The CPS Advisory Committee that assisted with overall design of the application and provided a sounding board for the application.
- Staff and management at Clinton, Gratiot, Livingston and Shiawassee counties.
- Staff and management at Bay, Arenac, Isabella, Midland and Saginaw counties.
- Michigan Department of Information Technology programmers involved in the project.
- Everyone that helped assist in the training of the application around the state.

SWSS CPS implementation is cited in the department's strategic plan as an important way to support staff and improve efficiency in managing child welfare cases.

Your letters,
intercepted
and otherwise

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5. Include the letter writer's hometown and the job classification(s) of any employee(s) cited in the letter.

We'll contact you if there are any questions about the letter after that. Thanks!